

Week Ending Friday, May 30, 1997

The President's Radio Address

May 24, 1997

Good morning. This past week, the House and the Senate voted by overwhelming bipartisan majorities to endorse an historic, bipartisan agreement to balance the Federal budget by 2002. This agreement brings us closer to putting our fiscal house in order, and it represents a huge downpayment toward America's future prosperity.

Already, our economy is the envy of the world. In the last 4 years, it's created 12 million new jobs. We've had the highest economic growth in a decade, the lowest unemployment in 24 years, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the largest decline in income inequality since the 1960's. The deficit has been cut already by 77 percent, thanks to the historic 1993 budget and economic package passed by the Congress at that time.

And now, with a balanced budget agreement, our economy can continue to thrive. We'll balance our books while we protect Medicare and Medicaid, invest in education and environmental protection, and give our people a tax cut. It's a balanced budget that's in balance with our values.

Now I urge all Members of Congress of both parties to take the next step, to finish the job and write this agreement into law. This is a proud moment. Our balanced budget agreement shows what we can accomplish when we work together, across party lines, in the interest of the American people. This is how our Government should work.

But today I have to talk about an example of how it should not work and how it's not working. Our Government is not working for our citizens in the Dakotas and Minnesota, who are still waiting for the Congress to act so that they can begin the long road back from the floods that destroyed their homes and devastated their lives.

Tens of thousands of people suffered losses in these floods. Now they're trying to

reclaim their lives and their communities. But they can't do it alone. Some have depended on the kindness of neighbors they didn't even know. The town of Thompson, North Dakota, doubled its population when residents opened their homes and their churches and took in 1,000 people from flooded Grand Forks, 11 miles away. Private citizens became angels, volunteering and donating everything from essential supplies to evening dresses, so that a flooded high school could still have its prom. One woman quietly donated millions of dollars for distribution to victims.

All that is welcome help. But recovering from a large natural disaster takes more; it takes the combined resources of our Nation. That was the only way back after the earthquakes and fires in California, the flooding in the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Northwest, the tornadoes in the South, the hurricanes in Florida. Right now, people in 33 States need some degree of disaster assistance. Just imagine being in their shoes, having your life's work swept away, your home gone, often in an instant. Think of your concern for your family and your home. That's why we need quick and effective governmental action, from rescue efforts by the National Guard to financial and other assistance from our Federal agencies. They've all done well by our people, and I am especially proud of the work of our Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, and its Director, James Lee Witt. Now FEMA is a model for responding to disasters. When I took office, it was often criticized; now I think it's the most often complimented Federal agency.

After I visited North Dakota with the congressional delegation, including the Senators from North Dakota, Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, who join me here today, and saw the impact of the floods last month, I asked James Lee Witt to chair a task force of our Federal agencies and come up with a plan for the region's long-term recovery. Now we

have that plan to deliver help quickly while we get maximum results for every Federal dollar spent.

But to get that long-term relief to our people, we must have action from Congress. I asked congressional leaders for just that, in an emergency supplemental spending bill, the kind that we have had before when we had disasters. Many Members, led by lawmakers from the flooded States, worked hard to get a bill to me, but I'm sorry to say, some Members of the majority tried to use this important bill for different purposes. And without taking action, Congress left town, and our people were left in the lurch.

Hundreds of thousands of our citizens are depending on this aid so they can get on with their lives. Even without action from the Congress, we're doing all we can to get immediate help to the victims. FEMA is using all the resources and authority it has to help with food, shelter, and emergency services. But these funds are limited. They will eventually run out, and they won't start the job of long-term recovery.

Unless Congress approves these disaster relief funds, the victims cannot begin their long-term recovery; they can't rebuild homes and businesses; farmers can't dig out their fields to plant crops. These people are in dire need, and Congress has failed to act for them. That is unconscionable. It flies in the face of the spirit of bipartisan cooperation we saw in our budget negotiations, and it's not how we treated other Americans when they were in similar dire straits over the last 4 years.

In North Dakota, I saw not only the devastation of the floods, I saw the determination of the people, proud people doing their level best to survive and get on with their lives. They don't expect free rides or handouts, but they do have a right to expect us to do the right thing by them, as we have by their fellow Americans when they were down and out.

The wrath of nature can be random, swift, and unforgiving. That's where human nature must provide a balance. We should act out of compassion, as many Americans have, to help the victims. And in Government, we must act because that is our duty as Americans. We cannot leave the victims without

the help they need and deserve. We have to act.

I urge Congress to do its part and to do it quickly. Disaster doesn't take a holiday. Let's work together to bring relief to people who need it—now.

In closing, I want to wish you all a happy Memorial Day weekend. Drive safely, drive slowly, and buckle up.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:08 p.m. on May 23 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 24.

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia May 26, 1997

Thank you very much. General Foley, Chaplain Schwartzman, Mr. Metzler, to the members of the Cabinet, General Shalikashvili, and the leaders of our Armed Forces, to Members of Congress, and especially to the members of the Armed Forces who are here, the leaders of our veterans organizations, all of you who are veterans and your families, and all of you who are family members of those who have given their lives in the service of our country.

My fellow Americans, we gather here today, as we do faithfully every year, to pay tribute to our country men and women who fell in the line of duty, who gave their lives to preserve the liberties upon which our Nation was founded and which we have managed to carry forward for more than 200 years now. All across America, our grateful Nation comes together today to honor these men and women, some celebrated, others quite unknown, each a patriot and a hero.

For many of our schoolchildren who have known no war, today may seem to be little more than a day off from school or a welcome start to the summer. But on this day, and all that we pause to remember, there are essential lessons for the young and, indeed, for all the rest of us as well: Appreciate the blessings of freedom; recognize the power and virtue of sacrifice; respect those who gave everything on behalf of our common good.

This day reminds us of what we can achieve when we pull together as one nation,